Vietnam Profile

by John McDermott

A History of the Vietnam Conflict and its Origins

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'I am sure that the great American People, if only they knew the true facts and the background to the developments in South Vietnam, will agree with me that further bloodshed is unnecessary .... As you know, in times of war and hostilities the first casualty is truth' — U Thant

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JOHN McDERMOTT is Associate Editor of *VIET-REPORT*, and instructor in philosophy at Long Island University, and contributor to *Dissent* and other journals.

PART ONE:

A introduction to the Vietnamese nation from its origin before Christianity, through the thousand-year Chinese occupation, and the war against the French up to 1954.

Vietnam occupies the eastern rim of the Indochinese peninsula. With an area of 127,300 square miles, Vietnam is approximately the size of New England plus New York and New Jersey, and its coastline is about the same length as the eastern seaboard of the United States. About 80% of its land area is covered with extremely dense vegetation: half of this is mountainous territory, rugged, sparsely settled, with few roads or clearings; the rest is covered by jungle of a thickness and density found in few areas of the world. The remaining 20% of the land area is made up of two great fertile deltas of the Red River in the North and the Mekong in the South and of the very narrow strip of coastal land between them, punctuated by the miniature deltas of smaller rivers. More than 90% of the population lives in these river lowlands, mostly the Vietnamese properly so-called, a people of Indonesian ethnic origin. Strongly influenced by the Chinese, Vietnamese culture in the lowlands finds its economic base in 'wet' rice farming. The peasants live scattered throughout the countryside in hamlets ranging from about 200 to 1,200 persons in population, located in close proximity to their fields. Many specialised skills are required for successful 'wet' rice farming; among these are dike and canal building, lifting and draining of water, manufacture and upkeep of fairly complicated tools and equipment and a precise knowledge of planting techniques and of the changes in rainfall and river volume. Because harvesting, planting and dike-building require a large labour force working in concert, the social organisation is intensely communal.

The role of the hamlet is frequently overshadowed by that of the Village. The latter is not a residential unit, but a political unit made up of several hamlets located in contiguous areas. Traditionally, it is governed by its village council composed of elders, notables and scholars who make all the important decisions relating to matters of water supplies for irrigation, land held in common and owned by the village, and taxation. These functions, as well as those of conscription, regional security and maintenance of public order are by custom the prerogative of the village and not of the national, provincial or district hierarchies. Although Vietnamese do not at all lack a consciousness of nationhood, the often-quoted description of Vietnam as a 'federation of villages' is quite accurate. The profound disturbances created

in traditional patterns by the two wars cannot be under-estimated, and will be discussed in the next chapter.

Ethnic Origins and Religion

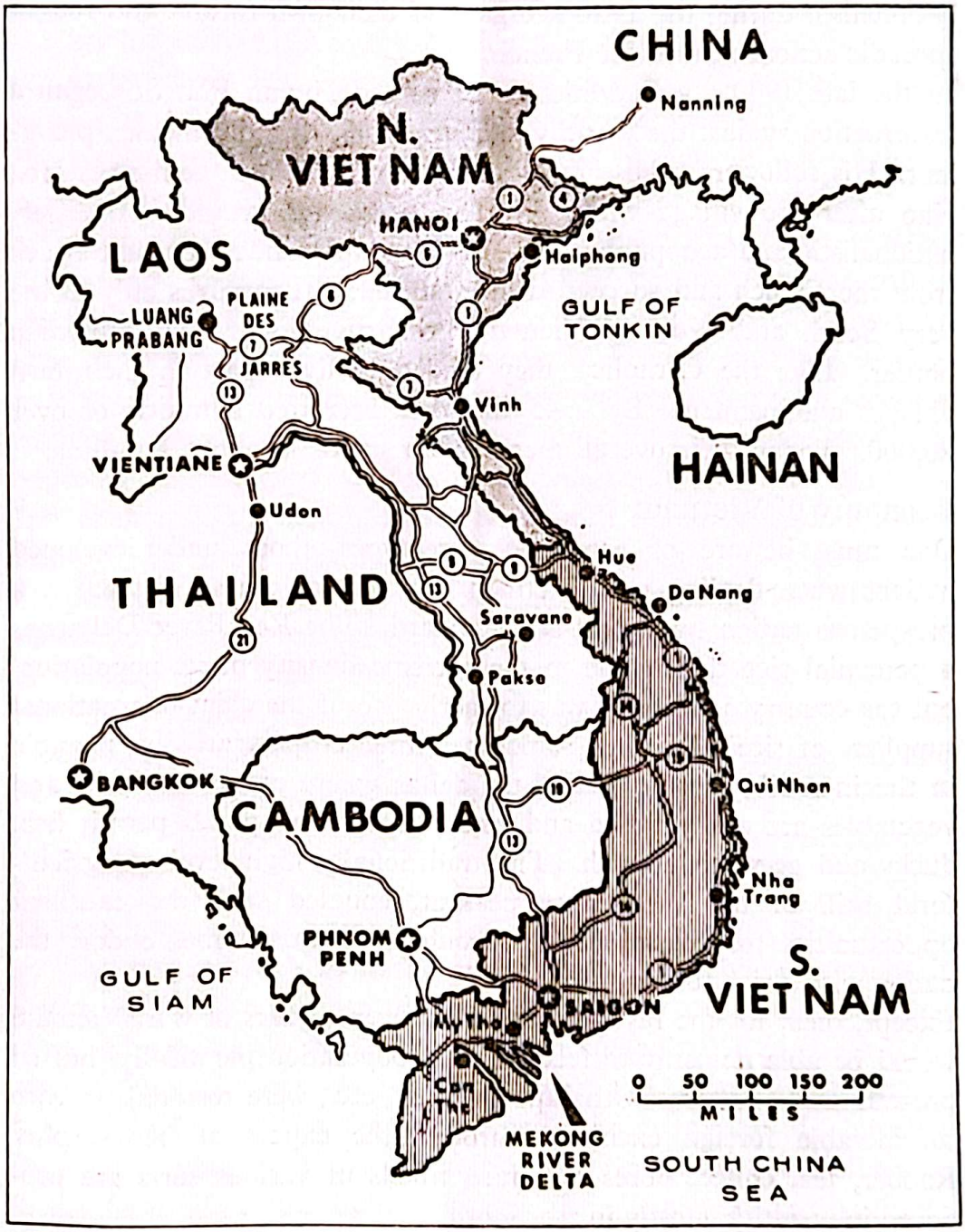
About five million of Vietnam's 32 million people (1960 figures) are not ethnically Vietnamese. The semi-circle of mountainous country surrounding the Red River Delta in the North is the home of about 2½ million members of the Muong, Thai and Meo tribes. Although the Northern tribesmen are traditionally considered inferior by lowland Vietnamese, their culture is at a level of diversification roughly equal to the latter's Their small agricultural communes dot the hillsides where they grow millet, maize and 'dry' rice (without flooding the fields). Another million tribespeople with semi-nomadic cultures inhabit the southern mountain plateaus (often called PMS after the French *Plateaux montagnards du Sud*). They also are an object of contempt for the lowland Vietnamese, who consider mountain people '*moi*,' or savages, apes.

As in most Asian nations, there is a large Chinese minority in Vietnam. About a million Chinese are concentrated in the cities and towns where they held a virtual monopoly over internal trade and commerce until the post-1954 governments in both Hanoi and Saigon made efforts to curb their activities. In addition about a half million Khmer (Cambodians) inhabit sections of the Mekong Delta but are becoming steadily assimilated into the Vietnamese culture.

More than 80% of the Vietnamese are nominally Buddhists. The Buddhist priests (bonzes) are held in high respect by almost all elements of the population, but the actual content and form of religious belief and practice vary so widely as to make a definition of orthodoxy impossible. Elements of Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, ancestor worship and animism exist side by side. Except in the area of the former imperial city of Hue, there is little formal religious organisation; rather, the peasants consider their rites a family matter, not a public concern.

Roman Catholicism was introduced by Jesuit missionaries who followed on the heels of Portuguese trades in the early seventeenth century. By the middle of the eighteenth century, Catholicism claimed a quarter of a million members. The Catholic communities have exhibited a high degree of internal organisation and, under the political leadership of the clergy, have traditionally lived a life apart from the Buddhist majority. Their history is strikingly similar to that of Poland's Jews. Because of their close ties to the occupying French forces, Vietnam's Catholics have suffered severe persecutions. There are now about two million Catholics in all of Vietnam. Before 1954 they were about evenly divided between the northern and southern

zones, but the exodus of about 750,000 Catholics from the North after the Geneva Accords has left a relatively insignificant number above the 17th parallel. On the other hand, South Vietnam's 1.7 million Catholics exercise a numerically disproportionate influence over the political events there.



Two other religious groups have played an important role in recent political history: the Cao Dai and the Hoa Hao. The Cao Dai, founded just after World War I, claim more than a million and a half adherents in the South, exercising their strongest influence in the Mekong Delta region, particularly in the province of Tay Ninh, in other provinces bordering on Cambodia, and in Saigon itself. Their religion incorporates elements of local Buddhism, Christianity, Hindu-

ism, and large doses of 'spiritual science.' Their clergy, headed by a 'pope,' is organised in a hierarchy modelled on that of the Roman Catholic Church. The extent of their borrowing is suggested by the fact that they count the French author Victor Hugo among their saints. Politically, the Cao Dai moved sharply in the direction of nationalism during the 1930's, organised their own militia and fought sporadic actions against the French.

In the late 1930's, a Buddhist bonze named Huynh Phu So began a reformation against the worldly and easy-going Buddhism then prevalent. His followers, whose ranks grew rapidly, called themselves Hoa Hao after the village where Phu So began his crusade. Intensely nationalistic and xenophobic, the Hoa Hao were under constant attack from the French and succeeded in establishing themselves only in the very South and West of Vietnam primarily along the Cambodian border. Like the Catholics, they tended to live apart in their own villages and hamlets. By 1945 they had recruited a militia of over 20,000. Today their overall membership stands at about 1 million.

Economy of Vietnam

One must beware of economic stereotypes about underdeveloped nations when dealing with Vietnam. In normal times, Vietnam is a prosperous nation by almost any standard. The Red River Delta has a perennial rice deficit due to the extreme density of its population, but the country as a whole was formerly one of the chief international suppliers of rice. Two and sometimes three crops yearly are possible in the incredibly fertile soil of the deltas where numerous fruits and vegetables are easily raised and where canals and ponds permit fish, ducks and geese to flourish. The traditionally high level of agricultural skill of the Vietnamese peasant, coupled with the excellent opportunities for coastal fishing, would in normal times endow the nation with a rich food supply.

Except, then, for the ravages caused by twenty years of war, Vietnam would be able not only to feed its own population plentifully, but (if pre-war trade patterns with Japan, China, etc., were restored) to earn considerable foreign exchange through the export of her surplus. Rubber, tea, coffee, fibres and rare woods of various sorts are produced in quantity, mostly in the South.

Numerous students have noted that the economies of North and South Vietnam are complementary. The South is rich agriculturally but has little potential for industry; the North has the reverse problem. There supplies of coal well located both for export and for use in domestic smelting are plentiful, and rich deposits of iron ore, tungsten, tin and other minerals await thorough exploitation. But feeding people has always been a problem for the North.

Prior to World War II, Vietnam had one of the better road systems in the Far East. The ensuing military campaigns have added many miles of superb new roads to the system which, needless to say, have been almost wholly destroyed through further campaigns. The network of canals is extensive, and there is a central railroad, but both of these means of transportation have received severe shocks during the fighting and will require much repair afterward. Excellent ports are at Haiphong and Saigon, among other sites, and coastal shipping will always play an important part in the economy.

Educational and technical skills have been in short supply. Like all people affected by Chinese culture, the Vietnamese have had a significantly large literate population. The Europeans made a major contribution in condensing the cumbersome ideographs of the written language into the briefer form of the Latin alphabet. At the same time, however, European and particularly French, influence resulted in a drop in the literacy rate and a restriction of access to technical training. In more recent times war and exile have decimated the educated classes, especially technical personnel. But since the First Indochinese War, major efforts have been made in both zones to improve technical education. This is perhaps the most hopeful sign of progress in the nation at present. Given a period of peace, economic co-operation between the two zones and moderate amounts of outside aid, Vietnam would prosper. There is abundant evidence that this potentially harmonious relationship is an important political fact which should not be discounted in assessing the nation's future, despite the present hostility between North and South.

Early History

Vietnam's history as a nation goes back to at least the third century BC By comparison, the first European power to achieve nationhood, Spain, did not do so until the fifteenth century AD. The Vietnamese state, known by 254 BC as Nam-Viet, occupied the Red River Delta and sections of what are now Kwantung and Yunnan provinces in China. By 111 BC, the Vietnamese had been driven out of China and were held subjugate by the Chinese in the Delta. After major revolts in the first, third and sixth centuries, the Vietnamese finally ejected the Chinese conquerors in 939. Domination by the Chinese effectively ended at that time, although they retained some tributary rights and occupied parts of Vietnam briefly in the fifteenth century and again after the Japanese surrender in 1945. It is significant that during the nearly one thousand years in which the Chinese reigned over Vietnam they did not succeed in eradicating the Vietnamese national identity, as is indicated not only by the recurrent rebellions but also by the

nationalism of much Vietnamese literature and the unbroken preservation of Vietnamese language and folklore.

The Chinese did, of course, have a profound cultural influence on Vietnamese life. Aside from 'wet' rice farming and its social institutions, the Vietnamese appropriated Chinese philosophy, law, religion, architecture and their fierce disdain for foreigners. They also adopted Chinese political forms, with a semi-divine emperor ruling through a mandarinate (an appointive civil service steeped in a classical literary tradition and recruited largely on the basis of merit as measured by competitive examination). However, the Vietnamese modified the political organisation in one crucial and characteristic way. Under the Tran and Le dynasties from the thirteenth to the sixteenth centuries, control of village administration passed from the mandarinate to the notables of the villages themselves.

From the tenth through the eighteenth centuries, the Vietnamese spread southward from the Red River in a policy of deliberate expansion aimed at gaining more rice land for a growing population. The people of these sparsely settled areas, when not destroyed outright, were either driven into the hills (which the rice-growing Vietnamese scarcely penetrated) or completely assimilated by the conquerors. By 1658 all of the area north of what is now Saigon was occupied. With the Vietnamese thus spread along a narrow, thousand-mile coast and lacking good internal communications, their cultural tendencies toward localism and regionalism accelerated. Already by the middle of the sixteenth century these tendencies had solidified into two factions centred in Saigon and Hanoi, respectively. Engaged in a bitter civil war, they divided the Vietnamese territory only a few miles to the north of the present line of demarcation. Their conflict continued intermittently until the end of the eighteenth century when the leader of the Southern zone, Nguyen Anh, succeeded with the help of French mercenaries in defeating the Northern faction and establishing sway as Emperor of all Vietnam and parts of Cambodia and Laos. He succeeded in bringing almost half a century of peace and stability, until French colonisation began in earnest about 1850. The dynasty ended only in 1955 with the ill-fated Bao Dai.

French Colonialism

Vietnam had had contact with the west as early as Roman times, but no relationship of any importance developed until Portuguese traders and missionaries arrived in 1535. These missionaries pursued their activities despite frequent persecutions, and Dutch, Portuguese and French merchants participated with varying fortunes in the civil wars. However, no political concessions and few commercial ventures resulted from the presence of the West until the middle of the nineteenth

century. French policy in Indochina had from the beginning been guided by the Church, the Army and the Navy. All three were bastions of sentiments which repudiated the great revolution of 1789, were hostile to republicanism, and longed for the traditional, authoritarian, Catholic and imperial France of an age gone by. As early as the seventeenth century, the Church had turned French attention to the cruel persecutions suffered by the tiny but flourishing Catholic community in Vietnam. In the ensuing century, again largely through the efforts of the clergy seeking to protect their flock, France grew to be the dominant power in the area. A radical change came over the character of the French presence in the 1840's when the French navy began to establish bases for its operations in Pacific waters. Thus by 1867 the port cities of Haiphong and Saigon had been annexed by the French, along with all of Cochinchina (southern Vietnam). A few years thereafter, the French Army also became interested. Following its humiliating defeat in Europe in 1870-71 at the hands of Bismarck, the Army committed itself more thoroughly to a policy of overseas conquest in order that levies of native troops might enable smaller France to match and overcome her larger German neighbour. In the next decade, through a combination of these military, religious, and also economic interests, French political conquest of Vietnam was completed.

The Vietnamese resisted this invasion, which they regarded as 'barbarian,' but in the decisive areas of military technology and political organisation, they were no match for the French. But, just as they had done against the Chinese a thousand years earlier, the Vietnamese resorted to guerrilla warfare and were not fully defeated until 1913. However, no decade of the period of French occupation was entirely free of armed resistance.

The history of the French in Vietnam must not be understood as the expression of a unified national impulse. On the contrary, French policy in Vietnam was rather the expression of highly specific and in many ways non-representative elements of the French polity. The most important of these were the Church, the Army and the Navy, certain speculative financial interests, and (later) a small but vociferous class of *colons* (French nationals living permanently in Vietnam). This point is important, because it shows why Paris was frequently unable to control Vietnamese events and consequently was often unwilling to give its support to those who did exercise control. Just as the initial French entry into Indochina was directed by a small range of French interests, so its fully developed colonial policy tended to operate independently of the Paris government and fell increasingly into the hands of the governor-general in Hanoi. This meant that in practice,

French policy was the creature of a few archbishops, generals, admirals, petty civil servants, and, last but not least, the directors of the Bank of Indochina, which dominated investments in the area.

French Administration

From the beginning, the French were present only on the surface and fringe of Vietnamese life; this further explains much of the history of Vietnam in the first half of this century. Few Frenchmen went to Vietnam. As late as 1937 the French population numbered just over 18,000, and almost all of these were members of the colonial bureaucracy or in the Army. The main cities were French; the areas immediately around the numerous military ports, the provincial capitals, the rice and rubber plantations northwest of Saigon were French. Some of the Christian villages were effectively French. But the overwhelming number of villages were by and large undisturbed by direct foreign influence. By 1884, the French had established protectorates over northern and central Vietnam (Tongking and Annam respectively), having earlier annexed all Cochinchina together with the ports of Hanoi and Haiphong. Yet the French administrative bureaucracy for the most part reached down only to the provincial level; the villages continued to enjoy the relative autonomy they had gained four hundred years before. Only in 1927 did the French begin to appoint village officials. The resentment of the villages at this violation of their traditional political sovereignty enlarged the gap between the French presence and Vietnamese life. The gap was widened still further by the social policies of the colonial regime. Discrimination against the 'natives' was severe, and few opportunities in government and business were open to them. All manufacturing, for example, was restricted to Europeans. Although the traditional Vietnamese school system had been excellent, the French authorities discouraged it prior to 1920; and as noted above, the literacy rate fell because the Vietnamese found it difficult to enter the limited facilities established by the French.

If the French presence was shallow, it was nonetheless disruptive, frequently cruel, and in the long run disastrous, even for the French. In the classic pattern, a flourishing Vietnamese cottage industry was destroyed by imports of cheap textiles, household utensils, tools, etc., from Europe. Unemployment was chronically high. There was considerable exploitation of native labour, particularly on the rubber, rice and coffee plantations which were established in the South. Frequently these plantations were created by dispossessing the peasants, who then became homeless wanderers or underpaid labourers in their own fields.

It would be unjust, however, to ignore the positive aspects of French rule: excellent medical and sanitation facilities, extensive reclamation of swamp and forest land, a fine road system, the development of port facilities, and agricultural diversification were among the accomplishments of the colonials. In the 1930's, when Leon Blum's 'popular front' government was in power in France, social legislation dealing with wages and hours, female and child labour, and working conditions was enacted which (at least on paper) placed Vietnam far ahead of the American-occupied Philippines, where wretched working conditions prevailed. Through the efforts of enlightened Frenchmen, a university was founded at Hanoi, and the education of a native elite was undertaken, however belatedly. Hundreds of Vietnamese were enabled to study and travel abroad, and thus came in contact for the first time was the republican and enlightened aspects of French civilisation.

2nd World War

As the Nazi armies rolled across France in June 1940, the Japanese government presented an ultimatum to the French Governor-General, Catroux. The Japanese demanded joint control over those parts of the Vietnamese-Chinese border through which Western (primarily American) supplies were filtering in to the armies of Nationalist China (Kuomintang). With their British allies fighting for their lives on the other side of the world, Catroux and his Vichy successor, Admiral Decoux, were left to deal with the Japanese demands without outside support, especially since it was then the position of the U S government that Indochina was not of primary interest to American security. Continuing their pressure, the Japanese had by July 1941 acquired extensive commercial privileges, important naval and air facilities, and the right to station a large garrison. (Ironically enough, it was at this point, ostensibly because of these Japanese penetrations in Indochina, that President Roosevelt froze Japanese assets in the U S, deprived Japan of petroleum supplies, and thus set in motion the Pearl Harbour raid.) While the war raged across the Pacific, French and Japanese forces maintained an uneasy peace in Vietnam. Then, in March 1945, the Japanese struck. In a quick but bloody coup they disarmed the French troops, interned the colonial administration, and informed Emperor Bao Dai that his nation had, after some sixty years of French rule, achieved 'independence' – albeit within the Japanese sphere of influence. This independence was intended to be no more than nominal. However, by the summer of 1945 Japan was in the throes of defeat, her Indochinese forces were virtually isolated from the motherland, and she was in no position to replace

the French administration with an effective one of her own. Meanwhile the villages, taking advantage of this impotence of the colonial powers, reasserted their autonomy with renewed vigour. Their return to traditional self-rule, including self-defence, was so intense and thorough that the later governments of both North and South Vietnam were to meet bitter opposition in their attempts a decade later to reintroduce the central authority of the cities.

The fledgling government of 'independence' set up at Hue by Bao Dai was unable to govern and chaos reigned. Allied bombing had so damaged Vietnam's chronically tenuous communications that over a million persons perished by famine in Tongking, while ample supplies of rice were on hand in Cochinchina. The French were in jail, their Japanese jailers were paralysed. Thus, as the Allies prepared to move in to accept the Japanese surrender, there existed no effective central authority.

National independence, however tainted in March 1945, had long been the goal of the Vietnamese people. Not an amalgam of uncivilised tribesmen, but a nation with a long, visible and proud history, Vietnam had given birth to modern nationalist movements almost from the first moment of French occupation in the nineteenth century. The Versailles Conference of 1919 had been attended by a Vietnamese delegation vainly seeking that national self-determination which was so prominent a part of post-war hopes. Among the delegates who learned at the Conference that this ideal applied only to European nations was a young nationalist by the name of Nguyen Au Quoc, later better known as Ho Chi Minh.

Origins of Vietminh

During the post-war years, a number of Vietnamese parties were founded with the aim of seeking political independence. Because of the French refusal to grant independence to the colony voluntarily, these parties tended to conclude that negotiation was useless and that their goal could only be achieved by violence. Almost without exception they were authoritarian and thoroughly anti-capitalist, and found their base of support in the tiny urban middle class. Frequently they were designed on foreign models. For example, the most important of them – the Vietnam Quoc Dan Dang (V N Q D D), established in 1927 – modelled itself in Sun Yat-sen's Chinese Kuomintang and maintained fraternal relations with it.

The depression of 1929 was world-wide. Because the prices of agricultural commodities fell, hardship was especially severe in the Far East. The year 1930 was marked by uprisings; they were sharply suppressed by the occupation authorities. Throughout the thirties, French policy toward Vietnamese political action was harshly repres-

sive. This policy effectively checked the nationalist parties by driving their leadership into exile. The central committee of the V N Q D D, forced to leave the country, rapidly lost contact with the situation in Vietnam. Most of the nationalist parties quickly degenerated into isolated, warring exile factions.

The young Vietnamese Communist Party was least damaged by these conditions and by this suppression. Founded only in 1930, but from the start possessing a base in the peasantry and skill in clandestine activity, the Party did what no other nationalist party had been able to do: it stayed in close contact with Vietnamese affairs. By 1939 the Vietnamese Communist Party was in contact with the Nationalist and with the Communist Chinese and was receiving aid from both. In addition to aid, the Chinese Communists provided training, on their own territory, in guerrilla tactics. In December 1940, during the disruption caused by conflict between France and Japan, these guerrilla fighters slipped into Tongking. Under their protection, many Tonkinese villages were able again to assume control of their affairs. In May 1941 the (now) Indochinese Communist Party met in territory temporarily liberated from the French, and took the lead in establishing a nationalist united front called the Vietminh. Because the Vietminh worked locally through the peasantry and was willing to fight both the French and the Japanese invaders, it became in time the chief expression of Vietnamese nationalism. It grew steadily, and by late 1944 was operating in force throughout Tongking, collecting intelligence on Japanese military deployments, committing sabotage against them and rescuing downed Allied airmen. These activities recommended them highly to the American O S S (Office of Strategic Services), and co-operation between this predecessor of the C I A and the leaders of the future Communist regime soon flourished. But most important, the Vietminh took advantage of the power vacuum created by the internment of French officials and Japanese inability to replace them. Entire districts became territory openly administered by the Vietminh. With increasing success, Ho Chi Minh's men earned for themselves the reputation of effective independence fighters representing a resurgent Vietnamese nation. When Japan surrendered, the Vietminh alone were in a position to step into the political and administrative void. Moving rapidly, they formed a National Liberation Committee on August 16, 1945, and two days later marched into Hanoi.

Events developed somewhat differently in Cochinchina. Various southern nationalist elements had collaborated with the Japanese; some, including the Cao Dai and Hoa Hao sects had also been armed and trained by them. As a result, the end of the war did not

create a power vacuum, as in Hanoi. Rather, Saigon was ruled by a 'United National Front' established with Japanese encouragement and including, but not at all dominated by, Communists. Emperor Bao Dai, isolated at Hue, feared the outbreak of civil war between the Hanoi and Saigon groups. Because he believed that Hanoi had the backing of the Allied powers, he voluntarily abdicated on August 23, 1945 and declared the government of Ho Chi Minh his legitimate successor. Thus armed with the trappings of legality, the Vietminh in Tongking moved rapidly to consolidate their position. Meanwhile, Nationalist Chinese armies were moving in from the North and British armies from the South to receive the Japanese surrender. When the leaders of the old Vietnamese nationalist parties returned from exile in the wake of the huge Chinese army plundering its way through Tongking, they were confronted with a *fait accompli*: the Vietminh were already in control. When French troops replaced the Chinese in March 1946 they found Vietnam ruled by an elected coalition government headed by the Vietminh, sustained by a well-equipped army, and enjoying the apparent support of both the Chinese and the American authorities. On March 6, 1946, the French recognised the independence of all Vietnam under the government of Ho Chi Minh.

1946 War with France

The precise meaning of that independence was in question, however. Negotiations between the French and the Vietminh, therefore, continued throughout the year. As it became clear to the French that Ho Chi Minh's Vietnam would not be part of a French-dominated union, and as it became clear to the Vietnamese that France was not prepared to grant full independence, military incidents between them became more frequent and more serious. By December of the same year, France and Vietnam were already at war. Superior French weapons soon cleared the Vietminh from Hanoi, the Red River Delta, and the northwest hill country, and drove its Vietnam People's Army (V P A) into the northeast. However, the French Expeditionary Force, predictably, lacked support in Paris. Large segments of the French population regarded the outbreak of fighting as an example of colonialist excess, and the colonial coalition was unable to get the number of troops it believed necessary for the achievement of a military solution. Consequently, the French forces were unable to pursue the offensive further, and the Vietminh were able to achieve a military stalemate despite severe weapons shortages only partly relieved by supplies smuggled in from the Philippines. The stalemate took a form which has now become familiar: relying on the eyes and ears of the peasantry, the Vietminh achieved supremacy in the hamlets and isolated villages, while the French, relying on superior firepower,

achieved supremacy in the cities and towns and along major roads. This state of affairs continued until the Communist Chinese armies, fresh from their victory over Chiang Kai-shek, arrived at the Tongking border in late 1949. Then the Vietminh began to take the offensive. Armed with American weapons supplied by the Communist Chinese (who had captured them from the Nationalists), they were able to clear most of Tongking and Annam of the French in five years of bitter and bloody fighting. By 1954, despite one billion dollars in American aid to the French war effort since 1950, the military situation of the colonial power was in shambles. Even the lowland and the urban centres of Hanoi and Haiphong were threatened by the Vietminh. In the spring of 1954, the noose began to tighten around Dien Bien Phu.

In Cochinchina, meanwhile, events again followed a radically different pattern. The British Army of Occupation, which had moved into the South to accept the Japanese surrender, was followed in October 1945 by troops from Metropolitan France – five months before the progress of French-Chinese negotiations permitted the French to move into the North. Nationalist and Communist Vietnamese leaders had meanwhile established a Provisional Executive Committee in Saigon. Angered by the move, the French community encouraged the newly-arrived French troops to clear Saigon of the independence forces with British help. The French commenced a campaign of eradication against independence elements, forcing the latter to seek refuge in the swamps of the Camau Peninsula and in the rugged terrain of the Central Highlands (P M S). By February 1946 the French were in almost total control of Cochinchina and South Annam. The new French High Commissioner in Saigon, Admiral d'Argenlieu, soon established a Provisional Advisory Council dominated by *colon* elements. Then followed a move characteristic of French rule in Vietnam. Urged on by the *colons*, d'Argenlieu 'recognised' the Provisional Advisory Council as the government of the independent 'Republic of Cochinchina' on May 31, 1946, without consultation or authorisation from Paris. He did this in spite of the fact that Paris had already recognised Ho Chi Minh's government in Hanoi as the legal government of all of Vietnam (including Cochinchina) nearly three months before. By this means, and by staffing the new 'government' with Vietnamese amenable to French manipulation, d'Argenlieu scored many initial successes over the independence groups. He was aided in this task by divisions in the nationalist movement itself and by the unpopular sectarianism and terrorism of the Southern Communists under Tran Van Giau and Nguyen Binh. The Cao Dai and the Hoa Hao sects soon broke with Giau and sent their militias, now re-armed

and reorganised by the French, into action against the Vietminh. Other nationalist groups and parties also gave support to d'Argenlieu. In this way the French had a far better start towards reoccupation of their colony in the South than in the North. They effectively maintained much of their military control in Cochinchina and South Annam until 1954, when the Vietminh gained possession of the Central Highlands and threatened a direct invasion of the South. At the same time the Republic's government in Saigon was crumbling, discredited by overt French manipulation. Nationalists began to defect to the Vietminh in increasing numbers. Resenting the brutality of French 'pacification' drives, and strongly attracted by the Vietminh's offer of land to the landless, the peasants of the Mekong Delta gave more and more active support to the independence forces. This support proved decisive. Local Vietminh forces held the Camau Peninsula, a large region north and northeast of Saigon, and controlled over half the remaining villages. It only remained for the battle Dien Bien Phu in the North to underscore the end of French rule in all Vietnam. As in no other colonial country before or since, the Vietnamese Communist Party under the leadership of Ho Chi Minh had succeeded in becoming the vanguard of a national resurgence. With widespread support through the entire nation, they had achieved military victory and de facto liberation from the French. Only the formalities of Geneva remained to ratify that triumph.

1954 Geneva Conference

The conference at Geneva which convened in April 1954 was to achieve an international solution, but not a Vietnamese solution, to Vietnamese affairs. In the past decade it has been this failure to achieve a solution in Vietnamese terms which, more than any other cause, has led to the breakdown of the international agreements then reached. Although technically the Accords were an agreement for a cease-fire between the Vietminh and France, in fact they represented an arrangement between the great powers dictated almost exclusively by European concerns.

In the years following 1944, the wartime anti-fascist co-operation between East and West slowly changed into a bitter international conflict. Specific crises over Poland and Germany led to generalised tensions between the great powers which were aggravated almost to breaking point by the beginning of the Korean War in mid-1950. Throughout much of 1951 there was serious talk in Washington of preventive war. An enormous crisis had been building over seven years, and perhaps even to a greater degree than during the Cuban missile crisis of 1962, the world was on the precipice.

Very slowly the great powers drew back from the edge. The death of

Stalin and the departure of Truman, coming within three months of each other in 1953, proved decisive in reducing tensions. Scenting the change, and strongly desiring a *detente* which would allow the British more independence of action, Prime Minister Churchill and Foreign Secretary Eden began to explore ways of easing the crisis. With Russian support, Britain moved first to settle problems which were taken to be merely peripheral to the European core of the cold war. France also saw the advantages of an agreement; the war in Vietnam was costly in money and blood, while the Soviet Union was offering serious enticements. France decided that her European interests had priority over her burdensome colonial commitments. Specifically, the Russians were interested in using concessions in the Far East to attain European objectives. The Soviet Union's major fear at the time was that the European Defence Community (E D C) proposal then being considered by the N A T O powers would lead to the rearmament of an unreconstructed West Germany and to the integration of German military power into a supra-national European army. Soviet diplomacy was willing to make substantial concessions to the French on the Vietnamese question in return for French co-operation in blocking the E D C. In fact, E D C failed in September 1954 for lack of French support; there is good evidence that the French were repaying their debts from Geneva.

The Chinese Communists were expected to be intractable opponents of any settlement. However, although Chou En Lai delivered the customary vitriolic denunciations, China went no further than speeches; it had suffered heavy losses in Korea and was at pains to avoid further open conflict with the United States. Moreover, the Chinese were bent upon accelerating their economic development. Thus China followed the lead of her wealthier socialist neighbour, and worked to achieve a cease-fire.

U S Policy at Geneva

The U S did not bring a consistent policy to the conference. Although in the fighting America had been supporting the French war effort heavily since Korea, there was great opposition to further involvement. President Eisenhower's 1952 'I shall go to Korea' speech was one of the chief factors responsible for his sweeping election triumph – a clear index of the powerful peace sentiment prevailing at the time. There was little willingness to pursue what was obviously a colonialist war. Senator Edward Johnson of Colorado summed up the feelings of many legislators of both parties when he declared in April 1954 that he was against sending American G I's into the mud and muck of Indochina on a blood-letting spree to perpetuate colonialism and white man's exploitation in Asia. Generals Maxwell Taylor and

Matthew Ridgeway also voiced the traditional Army fear of being drawn into a ground war in Asia.

On the other hand, voices were being raised in favour of using nuclear weapons. During the later stages of the siege of Dien Bien Phu both Vice-President Nixon and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Radford, lobbied for nuclear strikes.

Secretary Dulles went to the conference prepared to urge a 'hard' line, and worked to build a united front against the communists. His 'hard' line depended on the threat of massive unilateral American air strikes, possibly with nuclear weapons, against the Vietminh positions around Dien Bien Phu. Only this threat, Dulles felt, could tone down the Vietminh's demands and at the same time encourage the French to hope for victory at Dien Bien Phu and to continue the war. As occasionally hoppened, however, Dulles' policy differed from that of Eisenhower. Shortly after the conference began, Eisenhower in effect withdrew the keystone of Dulles' position by announcing to the press that the United States would not take any unilateral action in Vietnam pending the outcome of the conference. His threat thus discredited, Dulles left Geneva even before the Indochinese question was taken up. The American delegation (now led by Under-Secretary Walter Bedell Smith) subsequently played a minor role in the conference. Thus the advocates of a *detente* won the day. Their overriding objective was to end the fighting. Immediately following a three-week recess which ended in mid-July, a consensus was achieved and the work of the conference was rushed through so rapidly that the French representative, Pierre Mendes-France, reportedly described the procedure as a 'clearance sale.'

The Geneva Accords

Early on July 21, 1954, the Geneva Agreements on the Cessation of Hostilities in Indochina were signed. The Accords consisted only of an agreement between the French and the Vietminh military high commands. Although the great powers, including China and the U S, had negotiated the solution, they did not sign the document and thus only France and North Vietnam were technically responsible for its implementation. The Accords provided for a cease-fire, for the demarcation of the country into two provisional military zones on each side of the seventeenth parallel, and for the resettlement of civilians in the military zone of their choice. Both armies were to withdraw into their respective zones (Vietminh to the North, French to the South); the introduction of new military forces and equipment was forbidden. An International Supervisory and Control Commission (I S C C, or I C C) composed of Canadian, Polish, and Indian members was charged with supervising the execution of the Accords. At

the end of the conference all delegations joined in a Final Declaration, in which they 'took note' of the foregoing Accords, and emphasised that the two zones of military demarcation were not to be construed as national boundaries and that they were to be re-united by means of general elections to be held in both zones in 1956. Except for the United States and South Vietnam, each of the powers present expressed its approval of the Final Declaration. However, the Final Declaration was not signed by any of the members of the conference.

The cease-fire agreements themselves had been reached only over strenuous protests from the parties actually concerned. Once Emperor Bao Dai (who decided in 1949 to reassume his title and break with the Vietminh) appointed Ngo Dinh Diem Premier of the Republic of Vietnam under heavy American pressure, Diem registered strong objections to the agreements. These objections went unheeded.

The Vietminh also objected. They held vast areas in the Camau Peninsula and in the Central Highlands south of the seventeenth parallel, and did not wish to give them up. Premier Pham Van Dong of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (North Vietnam) did not conceal his displeasure at being forced to release at the conference table what the Vietminh had won on the battlefield. However, the Soviet Union, with Chinese concurrence, pressured the D R V by threatening to withhold economic assistance badly needed for reconstruction of the country. The Vietminh had evidence that the population was thoroughly weary of war. They feared direct American intervention. Finally, they had every reason to believe that they would sweep the elections two years hence. They signed.

In the end, Diem's representatives merely promised not to interfere forcibly with the implementation of the Accords. U S Under-Secretary of State Walter Bedell Smith stated in a separate declaration that although his government could not concur in the Final Declaration, it would not use force or the threat of force to interfere with the armistice agreements. He approved the principle of free elections, without specific reference to the Vietnamese situation, and promised that the United States would act to prevent further aggression in the area.

When the diplomats returned to their capitals, each could point to certain achievements. The Soviets and the British had brought about some relaxation of cold war tension. The Soviets had blocked the European Defence Community. France had made a relatively graceful exit from its disastrous Far Eastern colonial venture. The Chinese gained time during which they could turn their energies to internal development.

For the Vietnamese, however, little was achieved. In the perspective

provided by more than a decade since the conference, its inadequacy in solving the problems of Vietnam has become increasingly clear. As far as the Vietnamese people and their leaders were concerned, the conference at Geneva merely froze the bitter war in its least desirable phase. The nation was divided. The regime installed in the South had in numerous ways declared its hostility to the Accords. The French were ready to desert the area and to abandon their responsibility of implementing them. With the help of its friends, the Vietminh had had victory snatched from its grasp; the Soviet Union and China had demonstrated little interest in its views and little concern for the problems of its people.

Thus, in Vietnam where it counted, the Geneva Accords were fully inadequate. They had no support in the South. In the North they were tolerated only so long as it appeared that they would confirm the victory of Dien Bien Phu by means of free elections leading to national unification. When, with American backing, Ngo Dinh Diem refused to hold these elections, the stage was set for a renewal of the war.

PART TWO:

Between the 'Nationalist Solution' centered in Diem and the quite anti-nationalist military solution centered in the US, lies the little known history of American liberal reform in South Vietnam. Part Two details this history together with the origins of the civil insurrection which it encompasses.

In the South, following the Geneva Agreements in 1954, the government of former Emperor Bao Dai, now headed by Prime Minister Ngo Dinh Diem, was the shadow of a government nominally Vietnamese, but in fact staffed by the remains of the French colonial bureaucracy. Beyond the suburbs of Saigon, its authority ceased. The countryside was in chaos. The southern and eastern approaches to Saigon were controlled by the Binh Xuyen, a group of armed Vietnamese affiliated with the Chinese community in Saigon. Catholic militia patrolled substantial territory in the Ben Tre district. Widely scattered regions in the Delta were held by the sects, who had originally allied themselves with the Vietminh, but through a traditional allegiance with the Emperor and distaste for the sectarianism of the Vietminh, had found themselves fighting by the side of the French. In most of the countryside, however, the Vietminh reigned

supreme. Over two-thirds of the villages were under their control, most of them openly. Far removed from the main battle forces of the Vietnamese People's Army, the Vietminh guerrillas had carved out bases in the Mekong Delta, restored the village councils, trained village self-defence forces, redistributed land to the peasantry, and had begun to fulfill all the functions of civil government. Even in regions nominally controlled by the sect militia and the French Army, Vietminh village councils and cadres carried on their work under the very noses of their enemies.

With the cease-fire, the Southern Vietminh forces were forced to regroup to the North. Eventually, over 140,000 resistance fighters and their dependents fled the Southern zone and travelled north of the 17th parallel. Behind them they left a binding legacy: a peasantry which had enjoyed the benefits of self-rule for almost a decade and which bore strong loyalties to the departed Vietminh.

From the North a different and larger exodus began. Nearly 900,000 persons fled the communist Democratic Republic of Vietnam (D R V). Some, of course, were French colonial troops and their dependents. Most were Roman Catholic peasants (about 750,000) who had generally sided with the French and who fled expected reprisals from the victorious Vietminh. They had known considerable terror already and although the atrocity stories circulated by the clergy and by the French and American officials were vastly exaggerated, severe political reprisals and religious persecution would undoubtedly have been likely had they remained in the North.

Nevertheless, the Catholic descent to the French zone south of the 17th parallel was ill-favoured from the start. It strained the fragile economic and administrative capacity of the Southern zone even further. Eight years of war had devastated the countryside. French air attacks had effectively driven much of the peasantry into the cities where they could be managed: thus many acres of farmland lay untilled while the cities seethed with jobless and homeless farmers. Internal trade was at a standstill, roads, railroads, bridges and canals destroyed. The rapid diminution of the French Army raised the prospect of even further economic disaster, since its expenditures and those of its civilian employees had been the mainstay of the economy. With the French preparing to leave the South altogether, the prospects for the zone looked grim indeed, for the Vietnamese had no capacity to replace them.

But there was the United States. Finally free to create its own mandate, the United States was prepared to make major commitments. Even as Secretary Dulles left Geneva in disgust in May, he planned to continue the war against the communist-led Vietminh. But at first

in London and later in Asia itself he met rebuff after rebuff. The colonial solution to Vietnam's problems had been destroyed by the military defeat of the French. Should the West retain power, it could not be under the guise of a colonial administration even if it masqueraded as a French Union of 'Independent' states. And more important than the military failure, in fact underlying it, had been the political failure of the colonial solution. Western diplomats in general and American officials in particular realised the political success of the Vietminh. Communist or not, it had won the loyalty of the vast majority of the Vietnamese people, both rural and urban. That political success had enabled the Vietminh to meet and best a European power abetted by its American ally on the field of combat, and it held promise of winning the election to be held in 1956, thus uniting all of Vietnam under Ho Chi Minh.

The Nationalist Solution

The United States could not be discouraged by the failure of the French strategy; instead, she was prepared to launch a far more plausible one. If communist nationalism could mobilise a whole people against the French, the U S government asked itself, could not an anti-communist nationalism mobilise them against the communists, especially if the latter could be painted as puppets of the Chinese or the Russians? This approach became the policy of the United States even though it had previously been rejected by the French. The solution was simply to establish an anti-colonial, anti-communist Vietnamese government with U S help, stabilize the situation, and thus steal the nationalist banner from the Vietminh. Moreover, because communism preyed on the poverty and ignorance of the Vietnamese peasant, the chances of rolling back the Red Tide and achieving a victory for the West were guaranteed good if South Vietnam could be modernised. Such were the principle ingredients of what came to be known as 'the nationalist solution for Vietnam,' a solution which found an appreciative audience in many strata of American life.

The anti-colonial aspect of this solution was especially appealing to such senators as Mansfield and Kennedy, and it gained a widespread and well-received hearing through their efforts. American liberals, currently quarantined by Senator McCarthy, liked the emphasis on economic development and modernisation and the role such 'reform' would play in defeating communism in Asia. Such a victory for the West would vindicate their views. Thus prominent liberals like Arthur Schlesinger and Robert Nathan of the A D A, Max Lerner, and Leo Cherne associated themselves with the plan. Catholic officials in this country, especially Cardinal Spellman of New York, were understand-

ably concerned about their Vietnamese brethren, and for them, too, the nationalist solution seemed the best way to prevent disaster in 1956.

The adoption of this solution, however, raised new questions. Foremost: Just how binding were the Geneva Agreements to be? France as guarantor of its provisions had been the only power besides the Vietminh themselves to sign it. The nationalist solution required the quick departure of the French; did that not then imply that the Geneva Agreements were to be abandoned by both the North and the South? Second, given a major commitment in the area, would the United States be willing to accept political defeat if the commitment failed, thus permitting the Vietminh their inevitable control over a United Vietnam after the 1956 elections? These questions appear to have been sidestepped, and to the present day they have not been given a satisfactory answer.

Diem Takes Control

The regime and person of Ngo Dinh Diem fast became the embodiment of the nationalist solution. So much misinformation has surrounded Diem that it is important to reconsider the man today; it was largely due to that misinformation that the American commitment entrenched itself too deeply to risk the better judgement it could have made in 1963. According to popular accounts, Diem was unique among Vietnamese nationalists in that he had not been tainted by collaboration with either the French or the Japanese. Thus when he became Premier there was general rejoicing which swelled as the Southern zone was reported to be healing the scars of war under his able administration and democratic leadership. So successful was Diem assumed to be that his popularity soon rivalled that of the legendary Ho Chi Minh. The image was a stubborn one. As years passed and the pressures of a civil war increased, the austere Premier was turned into a virtual captive of his own secret police, and news had it that Diem had allowed himself to become the prisoner of toadies within the regime, particularly of his wily and ruthless younger brother Ngo Dinh Nhu. In spite of his invaluable friendship with the United States and his try at democracy, the American public believed it was Diem's natural xenophobia and domestic tyranny which had nonetheless managed to so cripple him that he was destroyed along with his brother and the odious tyranny which only the latter could have built. There is scant truth in this account. Diem differed little from other nationalist, anti-French, anti-Japanese, and anti-communist Vietnamese who spent the late forties and early fifties seeking the support of the United States. He differed from

the others primarily in that he had the luck to meet and impress Wesley Fishel in 1950.

In that year Diem had gone to Japan to seek the support of General MacArthur but had failed to obtain even an appointment to see him. However, he did meet and talk with Fishel, then an Assistant Professor of Political Science from Michigan State University. Fishel had strong albeit obscure connections with U S government circles, and it was not long before Diem gained the support of Senators Mansfield and Kennedy, and of Cardinal Spellman of New York. Although the details are still not certain, it is clear that it was with American encouragement that Bao Dai appointed Diem Prime Minister on June 19, 1954, while the Geneva Conference was still in session.

The Diem myth was so pervasive that certain concrete aspects of his regime have become falsified even through the later period of his decline and sudden infamy. Ill-at-ease in public, he was also a notoriously poor administrator; from the beginning he insisted on signing personally all passport applications. Like many Vietnamese, he disdained Americans; he admired the methods of the communists and copied them when he could. From 1954 on, he welcomed the influence of his family, particularly that of his able brother Nhu. Most Vietnamese viewed him as an interloper who, having avoided the perils of war, was now set upon reaping whatever benefit came of 'independence.' In the Army especially, there was strong antagonism. Sympathies fell largely with the French, since many Vietnamese officers had graduated from St. Cyr and had served and suffered with their French classmates in battle from Verdun to Dien Bien Phu itself. In short, he had few friends and many enemies, and was ill-prepared for the grave tasks with which he was then faced.

In Saigon alone the opposition was so intense that after a month in office his brother, Archbishop Thuc, advised him to resign. But, with the firm support of the American mission, Diem fought back. The major crisis came in September when nine of his fifteen ministers resigned and the Army threatened a coup d'etat. Again the Americans rallied and the Army, for example, was informed that U S military aid would cease if it deposed Diem. Opposition continued; Diem held fast. Following Senator Mansfield's glowing report to the Foreign Relations Committee in October, it became overwhelmingly clear that he enjoyed unconditional American support. Thus, when in January 1955 all U S aid was channelled directly to him rather than through the French, Diem's instinct for solitary rule could be founded upon an almost unassailable posture of strength. Toward the middle of the year, after he had purged the Army of its unfriendly leadership, he successfully turned upon his former allies the

sects, and destroyed their militia. In April the Binh Xuyen were driven from Saigon; through the summer and into the next year the Cao Dai and Hoa Hao militia were obliterated and their remnants driven into the Camau peninsula and the wilds along the Cambodian border. Meanwhile, in June, Diem had dethroned Bao Dai and an October 1955 referendum (only partially rigged), deposed him entirely.

The months following Geneva found the Vietminh with problems of their own. The cease-fire and the opportunity to build an independent, non-communist Vietnam had inspired many defections from their ranks. The Vietminh had itself openly attempted to form committees in support of the Geneva Agreements to press for their implementation. However, as early as November 1954 Diem's police smashed their organisations, making wholesale arrests of their leaders.

The Developmental Outlook

The objective of American policy in the area was, of course, to contain communism, and extensive military assistance poured into Vietnam in typical fashion. However, U S policy makers believed from the beginning that they understood the lesson the French had failed to learn. Accordingly, U S policy claimed first to be working toward the creation of a modern, democratic Vietnam. Two groups were entrusted with the job: the United States Operations Mission (U S O M) – the foreign aid agency – and the Michigan State University Advisory Group (M S U G). M S U G was a team of American professors under contract to the government of Vietnam and charged with the improvement of various aspects of Vietnamese governmental administration. It was led by Wesley Fishel.

American efforts in Vietnam were unique in at least one way. Because there were no extensive American economic interests in the area and because Diem's appreciation of the crisis led him to over-ride Vietnamese special interests, American planners enjoyed a relatively free hand in their implementation of favoured ideas about economic development. It is fair to say that Vietnam became a laboratory for certain American theories of the process by which technologically backward countries are led to modernise themselves. These theories, which for brevity's sake I call the Developmental Outlook, are still firmly embraced in this country, and it is important that their role in the eventual collapse of the Vietnam programme be understood.

According to the Developmental Outlook, the American relationship to the 'underdeveloped' world is one primarily of technical assistance – a seemingly neutral and scientific term which obscures all the political complexities involved in the confrontation of vastly different cultures. With appropriate modesty, it is understood that our political

and social forms cannot be exported wholesale to other peoples, but with remarkable lack of modesty, it is assumed that our technological orientation can be. Thus, American efforts overseas and particularly in Vietnam tended very strongly to ignore political realities under the assumption that the development of useful and humane social institutions would follow upon the development of the host country's economy. It is this last which is essential to the Developmental Outlook: democracy will succeed modernisation automatically but can in no sense precede or parallel it. Such an outlook guided our policy in Vietnam. It maintained that since colonialism and economic underdevelopment had left the peasantry easy prey for the millenial and utopian appeals of the communists, progress toward free institutions (or the maintenance of certain free institutions which the peasantry already possessed, such as the elected village council) had to wait. Only after the necessary political sophistication set in could there occur such political emancipation. In preparation for that, economic growth had to be pressed with all speed – and, if necessary, with a stern hand.

It is this view of the world which was the chief villain in Vietnam. Diem tended to follow the general lines of American advice; his most disastrous programmes had extensive American support in both their planning and execution. Nor is there a United Fruit Company or an oil sheik on which to cast the blame. Our personnel in Vietnam tended for the most part to be people of liberal and humane outlook who were sincerely interested in bringing forth a modern, democratic state – in that order: first modern and then democratic – and these people as well as the Vietnamese became the victims of their own world view.

This outlook established the pattern of priorities in Vietnam. It implied, first, complete support of Diem. His most important quality was his willingness to support changes to bring about modernisation; without such willingness Diem would never have gained the favour he did in so many liberal circles. Far from being a great Tory, as it is claimed, Diem was as willing to innovate as were his ubiquitous American advisers. He lent his support to land reform, agrovilles, crop development schemes, and even to an atomic energy programme. In the first five years of his regime he instituted almost as many changes as did his communist rivals to the north.

Second, the Developmental Outlook required that its main thrust apply to economic development. Emphasis was given to long-run projects rather than to schemes of immediate benefit to the population. Thus, development of transportation took priority over that of health services. U S O M reports abound in proud statistics of the

number of miles of paved roads built, civil airports opened, railroads repaired, and telephone systems expanded. Although tropical diseases were rampant, the improvement of medical services ranked low on the list of priorities. Nor was this based on ignorance. An early U S O M survey estimated that perhaps as much as 15% of the entire rural population was blind from trachoma, yet the modest efforts to arrest and prevent this disease is indicated by the targets set for health service development. It was hoped that in five years each district (about 65,000 persons are in a district) would have a clinic staffed by a chief nurse and a midwife and that there would be one visiting nurse for home care, one sanitary worker, and about a dozen health workers (with some first aid training). Even this timid programme was not carried through, and as late as 1958 over half of Vietnam's villages (each averaging 5,000 persons) did not have even a first aid station.
Third, a similar disproportion characterised agricultural development. Emphasis was given to commercial rather than to consumption crops: jute for export received as much or more attention than rice for consumption in spite of the extensive rice shortages in every year up to 1960.

Fourth, the Developmental Outlook required that security services be emphasised at the expense of the social services. Although a 1956 survey showed that 5,000 of Vietnam's 6,000 villages had no schools, the distant target date of 1970 was set to bring schools to all villages. The M S U G directed its major energies toward the training of over 600 policemen in its first year. (By 1958, over 1,000 were being trained per year.), and 12,000 militiamen (the Civil Guard) in addition. It would be reassuring if this could be blamed on Diem, but until 1961 U S government documents bragged of this.

Fifth, because cities are central to modernisation, the Developmental Outlook demanded that urban development take precedence over rural development. Here the inappropriateness of the programme was not quite so glaring, for other factors came into play. Large expenditures on Vietnam's armed forces and security forces constantly threatened a runaway inflation. To absorb such inflationary pressures, the United States supported an economy founded largely upon import. A Vietnamese who wished to import capital goods – as some did – or consumer goods – as most did – paid for the goods in cash to the Vietnamese government; the United States paid the same amount into a counterpart fund. It was this American money which paid for the imports, and the Vietnamese government used the importer's original payment at its own discretion. In this way excess money was absorbed and prices held reasonably firm. The net effect of the programme was to provide an enormous subsidy to urban residents; much of the

talk of Diem's 'economic miracle' stems from the urban prosperity this programme brought. In its first six years the United States expended $1,136 million on this programme, thus creating a rich urban class in stark contrast to the prevailing rural poverty. In the same period the U S O M expended only $15 million in project assistance to agriculture, even though agriculture engages over 90% of the Vietnamese population. These were bad crop years as well, and the combination of falling prices and falling yields appears now to have been one of the chief sources of rural unrest. No programmes were devised to meet this crisis, although extensive plans were afoot just then for industrialisation schemes.

Sixth, the Developmental Outlook helped bring about one of the terrible anomalies of the Vietnam programme. U S O M and M S U G reports are imbued with a kind of Peace Corps idealism, but this idealism exists side-by-side with the conscious erection of a totalitarian state. A secret police was organised: the Vietnamese Bureau of Investigation (V B I), which differed little from the Russian model N K V D and became the chief instrument of Diem's totalitarian control system. The Americans dug wells in rural areas to bring pure water to the peasantry, yet built an 'Interrogation Centre' for the V B I. Some of the M S U G people worked on cultural programmes, but eight of the first thirty were police advisors. Again, the real villain here appears to have been the ideas and principles which Americans brought to bear upon the Vietnam problem: the idea of an ignorant, helpless peasantry and the principle of preventive and punitive political control. How else can one explain how a group of average Americans with presumably decent motives could know that over 650,000 Vietnamese suffered from malaria and yet take five years to begin the Malaria Eradication Programme, while spending the intervening time completing the fingerprinting of the entire Vietnamese population? How else can one explain the fact that Americans annually trained over ten times as many policemen – including Diem's secret police – as agricultural technicians?

Finally, the view that the Vietnamese were underdeveloped and politically immature led to the growth of a colonialist attitude on the part of Americans in Vietnam. As Americans grew disdainful of the 'natives' they became the de facto directors of the Vietnam programme. (Even today many American military 'advisors' have less experience, less training, and are younger than the Vietnamese officers they are supposed to advise.) The same attitude prevails in the American urging, planning, and execution of the resettlement programmes which threw the entire countryside into turmoil in the late fifties. Only an attitude which summarily dismissed the deeply-rooted values and chosen ways

of life of the Vietnamese peasants could have led to such ill-advised programmes – ill-advised especially from the standpoint of the sociological training so many Americans carried with them.

An Independent South Vietnam

From the beginning, the question of national unification plagued Diem and his American advisors. Almost from the beginning, it was decided to forge ahead and build an independent South Vietnam along somewhat the same lines as independent South Korea and West Germany. On January 1, 1955, the decisive step was taken when with the assistance of the Federal Reserve Bank the Vietnamese banking and currency system was reorganised to the exclusion of the North Vietnamese. The D R V responded on February 4 with a request for a normalisation of relations and the beginnings of the consultations which were to lead to the elections of 1956. It was ignored. On March 9, 1955, President Eisenhower, who had been cool to the nationalist solution, declared his support of Diem in a personal letter. After announcing in May plans for the election of a South Vietnamese National Assembly, Diem publicly declared what was already clear: there was to be no unification. According to the Geneva Agreements, July 20, 1955, was to have been the deadline for consultations to begin between representatives of the Northern and Southern zones to plan for the free elections of a year later. These, in turn, were to lead to reunification of the nation. Four days before the deadline Diem broadcast to the North the declaration that he was not bound by the Agreements, and on August 9 officially informed the D R V of his decision. In a press conference in Washington on August 30, Secretary Dulles supported him in this position. In March of 1956 the Southern regime held elections for a National Assembly. Diem's National Revolutionary Movement (N R M) won a clear victory in the election which other parties boycotted. The Vietminh and the Communist Party were not allowed to present candidates, having previously been outlawed. The July 1956 deadline for the elections passed without incident. Then in January 1957, in a move much resented by their Southern comrades, the National Assembly of the D R V announced a policy of 'building socialism in one country.' This meant that any form of aggressive foreign involvement was to be sacrificed in favour of internal consolidation. In this they were supported by the Soviet Union, which in the same year proposed that both Vietnams be admitted to the United Nations.

Although it was made to appear at the time that Diem and his American advisors had weathered the storm of unification and scored a victory for the West, such was hardly the case. The D R V, cut off from Southern rice, was forced into a new and closer co-operation

with the Soviet Union in order to make up its food deficit. The remaining Vietminh and communist elements in the South were partially alienated from the advice and direction of the more conservative Ho Chi Minh and within a year were to be participating in a rebellion in opposition to his 'line.' Among the opponents of the Vietminh the reaction was no less serious. The population shifts of 1954 had left many families divided by the 17th parallel and now the border was completely closed. Almost all communications between the two zones were severed. Families who wanted to remain in contact were reduced to the use of a single postcard on which messages could be transmitted only by checking the appropriate printed boxes. All other communication was prohibited.

Far more important, the refusal to allow reunification turned the real nationalist issue back to the Vietminh. Thus, even by 1956 the 'nationalist solution' was for all practical purposes defunct. This is clearly revealed in the success of Viet-Cong propaganda from that date on. Recalling bitter memories of how the French colonialists had administered the country in parts – Tonkin, Annan, P M S, and Cochin-China – opponents of the regime never tired of pointing out that the Americans and Diem were now engaged in the same practice. In all Viet-Cong propaganda the expression M-Diem regime – the American-Diem regime – became the standard description of the Saigon government; and Diem was always depicted, quite credibly, as a colonialist puppet of his American 'advisors.'

The Origins of the Insurrection

A second look in to the apparent prosperity of the cities in the early years yields further insight into the method of Diem's power and the reason for its failure. In this regard the crucial role of the American subsidy must be understood. Although estimates of Saigon's unemployment rate hovered around 25%, the influx of American cars, textiles, and other goods (which wound up primarily in the hands of the civil servants) seemed to belie the poverty the figures represented. Despite the fact that such importation discouraged native industry, Diem discouraged technical training and industrialisation, so there were few job opportunities for the young. His regime was staffed largely by Catholics (mostly Northerners) and urban, French-speaking Vietnamese; with these outsiders as his base, his erection of a police state, especially after October 1956, was facilitated. The vast secret police organisation, trained and subsidised by the American government, squashed all opposition. Dissenters, objectors, and the many unfortunates who were simply suspected of disloyalty were sent to re-education camps where through brain-washing and physical torture the inmates were taught to mend their ways. By early 1956

Americans estimated that Diem's camps held from 15,000 to 20,000 political prisoners.

Because the sole news service and newspaper distribution system were government-controlled, the press was largely silent; any criticism would be immediately followed by police raids and the closing of the offending paper. Like the communist parties upon which it was modelled, the official N R M easily took all elections. To ensure this, brother Nhu had organised the Can Lao, or Personalist Party, a clandestine group which infiltrated every level of government, Army, and Party, and which had its own secret police to curb oppositionists.

The countryside posed a different threat, on the strength of which the regime was eventually broken. By mid-1956 Diem had seen the Vietminh move North and had defeated the sect militias. Yet throughout the villages both the sects and the Vietminh had left behind strong loyalties. Most important, the Vietminh had bequeathed the peasant-elected village councils, and many villages had their own self-defence forces. The government moved circumspectly to tackle the problem of 'pacifying' the countryside. In its first two years the Diem regime merely replaced the old French presence. Province and district chiefs loyal to the government were appointed, and Civil Guard detachments occupied the old French forts and posts. Meanwhile the Civil Guard was re-trained, re-equipped, and enlarged, while the N R M and Can Lao built their cadres. By the end of 1956 this process was completed, and the real task of 'pacifying' the countryside began.

Rural Pacification

Rural pacification involved a three-pronged assault on the problem. First, in October 1956 the government abrogated the traditional autonomy of the village by appointing the village chiefs and councils. This was in itself a return to the French system and was much resented, but Diem went yet further. Within the villages the central government appointed chiefs for each hamlet. Within the hamlets *khom* were organised – groups of 25 to 35 families whose chiefs were also appointed. Within the *khom, lien-gia* which consisted of about five families each were organised into cells, again with appointed chiefs. Chiefs were responsible for the loyalty of their people, and to this end an extensive mutual spying system was instituted. All were to be fingerprinted, and identity cards were issued. Permission to leave the village had to be obtained in writing, and counter-signatures were required before a man could leave the province. In short, a totalitarian regime was imposed upon the countryside.

The second prong of the assault involved the pacification sweep. Supported by the Civil Guard, the Diemist apparatus slowly invaded the villages. Recalcitrant villages were surrounded and softened by

artillery action, after which the Civil Guard moved in and disarmed the self-defence forces. Communists and key leaders were likely to be killed outright, although many fled the more settled districts and gained protection in outlying areas, particularly from the mountaineers of the P M S. Mere sympathisers and families of Vietminh personnel were arrested wholesale. Imitating communist techniques, mass meetings were held to 'denounce communists'; in this way many innocent persons were thrown into the regime's rapidly expanding jails. Ignoring the intense family and kinship loyalties found in Vietnamese peasant life, the government forbade those arrested to communicate with their families except through the little postcard with a handful of boxes to be checked.

Frequently landlords followed the Civil Guard into the village, and the old land system, which had been changed by Vietminh land reform, was reinstituted. Taxes and back taxes, rents and back rents were collected.

The French had tried this approach to rural security, but on a smaller scale, so the government realised its inadequacy. Thus to the two prongs was added a third which eventually involved almost the entire peasantry. This third prong required the mass regroupment of the peasantry in order to bring it under tighter government control. The programme which began with the unfortunate refugees was soon applied wholesale to natives of the South.

Of the 750,000 civilian refugees who had fled the communist zone after Geneva, 660,000 were installed in temporary refugee camps along the roads north and northeast of Saigon by the spring of 1955. Most of the refugee villages were so re-settled as to form a security belt around Saigon and its approaches. Thus Gia Dinh Province which contains Saigon, already the most densely populated of the South Vietnamese provinces, underwent a population increase of over 20%. Secondly, villages were strategically placed in zones throughout the rest of the country in such a way that the Catholic villagers whose experience had made them exceptionally anti-communist might serve by example and main force to control the remainder of the countryside. To admit the refugees, village sites were cleared of former occupants by force, and the displaced natives were frequently required to ready the land for the refugees' occupation. The refugees themselves were loathe to abandon the security of Saigon's environs to brave the wrath of those dislocated in their favour, and frequently they too had to be forced to resettle. Given that about 400,000 were finally setled in the already densely settled region around Saigon, vast numbers of Southerners must have been displaced. In a revealing lapse, U S O M Reports take extensive credit for assisting in the

resettlement of the refugees, but fail in any way to describe the fate of the poor Southerners who were removed.

U S government estimates stated that the refugee Resettlement Programme was to have been completed by the end of 1957, and most accounts of the 'miracle' of refugee resettlement, including the official ones, claim that it was. Calculations based on U S government figures indicate, however, that by January 1958 there remained about 100,000 refugees not permanently settled.

The experience of resettling people in order to improve the security situation seems to have emboldened the Saigon government as to its possibilities. In mid-1957 the Land Redevelopment Programme was devised to resettle about 50,000 residents of the overcrowded central lowlands into the P M S and the border regions along the Cambodian frontier in order to improve security in those areas and to bring new lands into cultivation. It was this programme which was apparently used to cover the failure of the refugee programme to meet its deadline. In any case, three times as many persons became involved in the programme as were originally planned. The pattern of resettlement so often acted-out in the past was here repeated. First, native residents were rounded up; then the great bulldozers, each bearing the legend 'A gift to the people of South Vietnam from the people of the United States,' began to flatten little hamlets. Local people under guard, together with new arrivals also under guard, began the construction of new houses, laid new roads, and dug new canals and dikes. As in Refugee Resettlement, planning was frequently very bad: too little land allotted, not enough troops to fight off the aroused local people, not enough seed, etc. And like that programme, too, the Land Reform Law was frequently used to legitimise the seizure of land. About 80 new villages were resettled lhis way, most of them in zones which had been old Vietminh strongholds: Zone D north of Saigon, the Plain of Reeds along the Cambodian border, the U Minh Forest Area in the Camau Peninsula, the Plaiku-Kontum area in the Central Highlands.

Agroville and Strategic Hamlets

Largely because of this programme, the countryside was in a turmoil by early 1959. Rather than respond by halting the programme, the government changed and expanded it, calling the new villages 'Agrovilles.' About 80 of them were planned originally, involving about 600,00 peasonts, mostly native Southerners; but fierce opposition prevented all but 22 from being erected. The Agroville Programme had the same objective and used the same methods as the Land Redevelopment Programme, but with one important difference. Rather than allow the new villages to spread their hamlets over the

countryside in the traditional South Vietnamese pattern, all of the houses were clustered around a Civil Guard or Army post. It was hoped in this way that the movement of peasants could be controlled and the rising wave of insurgency frustrated. In addition, two kinds of Agrovilles were planned, hopefully adjacent to one another. The first would include the untrustworthy and the other the Catholics, a check on the former.

By 1961, however, most of the countryside had gone to the Viet-Cong in spite of – or, more accurately, because of – the Agroville Programme and its predecessors. The inspection visit of Vice-President Johnson in the Spring of 1961 and the Staley and Taylor Missions later in the year found the Agrovilles inadequate. The price of further U S assistance in behalf of the Diem regime was to involve still another change. This was the strategic hamlet.

To enforce military and police control of the peasantry, the Strategic Hamlet Programme continued to break up the settlement pattern of the countryside. Peasants were forcibly regrouped into central areas, their homes and villages razed. There they were forced to build crude housing under military direction. The settlements were then surrounded by barbed wire and fortifications, and passes were required for entrance and exit. Within the strategic hamlets large military units were garrisoned. According to the Diem government, the programme was instituted in March of 1962 and was intended to eventually involve the entire peasantry. By April of 1963, at the height of the programme, the government claimed to have built 5,917 hamlets with 8,150,187 inmates. The programme received the full support and subsidy of the U S government, although U S officials had one criticism: the programme was a good one but was pushed too fast for the resources then available.

Thus by a system of totalitarian controls, by a series of military expeditions against its own peasantry, and by the forced regroupment of almost the entire rural population did the Government of the Republic of Vietnam attempt to pacify the countryside. In a period of eight years the entire social system of the countryside was destroyed. Attempts had been made to replace the peasantry's complex social, political, and economic relations by administrative fiat. What each of the successive programmes shared was the assumption that the sole source of rural unrest was the exploitation of scattered villages by a small band of insurgents, the Viet-Cong. It was assumed that the peasantry didn't care about politics – all it wanted was to be left alone to grow its rice. If one could provide police security to the villagers they would forget all about insurgency and return passively to their fields. Such security could be achieved, then, by planting

loyalist villagers in their midst, or that failing, by moving the offenders to another district, or that failing, by grouping them in an Agroville or behind the barbed wire of a strategic hamlet.

Naturally, the peasantry rallied ever more to the insurgents, so that by the end of 1963 most of the strategic hamlets had disappeared, along with Ngo Dinh Diem. The regroupment schemes had convinced the peasantry that Viet-Cong propaganda was accurate. Diem was a puppet, and like the French puppets he had no respect for Vietnamese institutions such as the village, with its traditional council and its holy places. Because he was under the control of the Americans he was willing to raze the houses of the people, destroy the shrines of their ancestors, tear up sacred burial grounds, and force a helpless people into what a *Wall Street Journal* reporter called 'concentration camps.' To this day Viet-Cong propaganda can paint a vivid picture of the Army detachment moving into the village with American surveyors and the green bereted American advisor at the lead. The picture is bound to be effective, since the peasant who hears it very likely went through just such an experience in the recent past.

Origins of the Civil War

Through all the years of the Diem regime there was armed resistance to the government, but only after 1960 did there appear a military challenge serious enough to threaten the regime's existence. In the cities resistance was attributable to opposition to police state methods, to the failure of reunification, to knowledge of the growing unrest in the countryside, and to the mis-government of the regime. In 1956 a nationalist group, the Greater Vietnam Party, staged a small armed rebellion in Central Vietnam which was quickly suppressed. In 1957 there was an unsuccessful attempt to assassinate Diem. Following the fraudulent elections of August 1959, resistance intensified but was not very effective. Characteristic of the urban opposition was the famous 'Manifesto of the 18th of April 1960' in which eighteen prominent Vietnamese pleaded for reforms. Such pleas were ignored, their authors jailed. As the situation in the countryside deteriorated, the military forces themselves, long a source of plots and the last hope of the Saigon opposition, grew steadily more hostile. The paratroop rebellion of November 1960 and the bombing of the Presidential Palace in February of 1962 foretold what was to come. Barring outright victory by the Viet-Cong, however, only Washington's approval could displace Diem. That approval did not come until after the military disasters of 1963 in the Delta and the well publicised suppression of the Buddhists at Hue in the same year. Appropriately enough, it was through an Army plot that Diem was finally toppled. Just as the French *Surete* was able to keep the various nationalist

parties under control, so too was the V B I able to do so now. The lesson of the Vietminh had been lost on these Europeanised civil servants: successful rebellion could be launched only from the countryside.

Through the years 1956 and 1957, Binh Xuyen remnants in Long An Province south of Saigon and in the marshy areas at the mouth of the Mekong resisted repeated mop-up operations. Similarly, Hoa Hao and Cao Dai guerrillas were active in the Plain of Reeds, in Camau and Tay Ninh Province. Saigon's attempts to integrate the Cambodian minority provoked still a new source of opposition. However, until 1957 the opposition in the countryside was more a nuisance than a threat. Only with Diem's attempt to extend his administration to the villages did widespread rebellion begin.

After 1957 new factors aggravated the rebellion. Most important was a serious depression in the countryside. In July and August of 1957, Saigon began an intensive campaign to force the large Chinese minority to adopt Vietnamese citizenship. The Chinese retaliated by staging a widespread and effective strike. So dominant were they in internal commerce, rice trading, milling, and river transport, that their strike paralysed the economic life of the countryside. This disruption was followed by a period of deteriorating rice prices combined with a slower but steady increase in the price of necessities. During the poor rice yields of 1957-58, the government intensified its forced rice collections in an effort to counter the strike and maintain export levels, thus alienating the peasantry even further.

The Failure of Land Reform

Moreover, in early 1958 the Land Reform Programme began in earnest. Before the first Indochina war, South Vietnam had a few vast land-holdings with a large unlanded peasantry which worked when it could under a sharecropping arrangement, leaving it bereft of all but the bare necessities of life. The government programme aimed first at reforming these tenancy contracts, a useful and humane programme inasmuch as tenants were generally at the mercy of the landlords. It was the other aspect of the programme, the actual redistribution of land which raised the greatest opposition. The programme had been designed by Wolf Ladejinsky, a former victim of Senator McCarthy who had become agricultural adviser to President Diem, and it was similar to those he had successfully carried out in Japan and Taiwan. The programme envisaged the purchase by the government of the largest holdings and their resale to the peasantry on a time payment plan. To the puzzlement of the Americans, the peasants picketed and rioted at the Land Reform Centres; surveyors were driven away and often murdered. Again the Vietnamese reality had been ignored. The

Vietminh had already carried out their own land reform long prior to 1954, and it was remarkable in its simplicity and its success: the land went to those who tilled it. The peasants thus greeted Ladejinsky's programme as an attempt to make them pay for what they believed they already owned.

The rebellion in the countryside gathered more and more support. Diem's tendency to rely on Roman Catholics within his administrative apparatus and the overt discriminatory policies of the regime alienated many Vietnamese, particularly among the Hoa Hao and Buddhists. Suppression of political opposition of all shades and frequent purges of both government and military officials drove many more into opposition. Most of these people fled the perils of the cities for sanctuary in the rural areas already under control of the insurgents, thus contributing important technical, administrative and military skills to the rebellion.

In the early years the rebellion was peculiarly defensive. It aimed at clearing the Diem apparatus from the villages and at taking such steps as were necessary to prevent its return. Key officials in the village apparatus were intimidated and driven out, while the villagers returned to the old system of choosing their own village councils. Particularly odious officials were assassinated or frightened into ineffectiveness under threat of assassination. Many village officials begged Saigon to be allowed to resign, and when refused they continued the empty motions of administration while the real administration fell into the hands of the opposition. This was particularly true for the villages so located as to be easy prey for the increasingly violent pacification sweeps. Other villages fortified themselves so as to prevent their pacification. Traps lined all paths leading to them; moats were dug and implanted with spikes; primitive weapons prepared, and ever larger self-defence forces organised among the peasants. Attacks on government posts were infrequent, and ambushes conducted against government forces rare unless the latter were engaged in pacification.

At first the communists tried to temper the rebellion. Fleeing the pacification drives which began in early 1957, increasing numbers of former Vietminh and their dependents joined the remnants of the sects in the U Minh forest in Camau, the jungles of Zone D north of Saigon and the sparsely settled districts along the Cambodian border. Others fled to the refuge of the mountain tribes in the P M S, or to the mouth of the Mekong where they joined elements of the Binh Xuyen. Within a year what came to be known as the Viet-Cong had been formed. Under heavy pressure from the peasantry, from which it drew its most important support and its most numerous cadres, the southern communists soon defected from Hanoi's line and finally

began to give leadership to the scattered village efforts.

Formation of the N L F

The development of the southern communist role was not unusual, for they had long engaged in activities disapproved by the predominantly northern leadership of the Vietnamese Communist Party. The My Tho rebellion of 1940 and Tran Van Giau's divisive policies during the mid-forties are instances of this tendency. In 1949 the present Premier of the D R V, Pham Van Dong, was forced to make a dangerous journey through 500 miles of French-held territory to discipline the 'individualism' of his southern associates. Nevertheless, the division which appeared in the ranks of Vietnamese communism brought intense debate to the councils of the Lao Dong Party – the Communist Party of North Vietnam. When the Agrovilles drove the peoples of the P M S into rebellion in 1959 this debate intensified, and at the Lao Dong Central Committee in May it was decided to extend some minor support to the southern insurgents. (This debate and the policy line which emerged antedated open Soviet-Chinese differences on whether or not to support wars of national liberation. Thus, although official U S policy assumes that the insurgency began after and as a result of the split, and at China's urging, it now appears that the war in the South may have been one of the early causes of the split.

In March of 1960 small amounts of military equipment together with a handful of technical advisers were sent into the P M S. Although the assistance was negligible and arrived over two years after the rebellion began, at a time when most of the countryside was already under Viet-Cong control, the shift in the Hanoi 'line' was to have an important effect. Assured of their ability to force Hanoi's acquiescense to their policy, the Viet-Cong began in early 1960 to challenge the A R V N for military control of the nation.

The opening attack came in late February 1960, when a combined force of Viet-Cong and sect guerrillas over-ran a military post in Tay Ninh Province and carried off a large quantity of small arms, mortars and other military equipment. These weapons became the source of still more arms as scores of tiny government posts were over-run throughout the middle of the year. The severity and frequency of Viet-Cong attacks became so great by the end of the year that even A R V N battalions could no longer travel with impunity through the countryside.

Meanwhile, in March the foundation of the Nam Bo (South Vietnam) Veterans of the Resistance had been proclaimed with a programme which called expressly for the liberation of the country from the 'My-Diem' regime. This open proclamation of rebellion by a group

which represented an already widespread protest movement, as well as the obvious success of its military campaigns, forced Hanoi's hand once more. By September the hesitant leadership of the D R V issued a call in the name of all of the Vietnamese people to co-operate in the overthrow of the Saigon regime – although it still continued to withhold substantial military support.

In December 1960 the Nam Bo Veterans joined with other groups in proclaiming a National Liberation Front and called upon all Vietnamese to aid their Liberation Army in its task of destroying the Diem government. From the beginning the South Vietnamese Communist Party took a leading role in organising the N L F and almost certainly dominates it. However, among the wide variety of organisations which the Front includes are members of the Cambodian minority, a Catholic priest, several political parties, and representatives of the sects and the Binh Xuyen as well as of trade unions, and women's and youth groups. Following Diem's overthrow the Front suffered several defections, particularly among the Cao Dai and the Hoa Hao. The persistent militarism of the successive governments in Saigon, however, seems to have stemmed these defections, and more recent reports suggest that the N L F has been able to draw upon an even wider base of organised support than under Diem.

The programme of the N L F calls for the overthrow of the Saigon government, to be followed by free elections with universal suffrage for the purpose of constituting a National Assembly which would then assume the task of governing the country. Although it has refused consistently to enter into negotiations with foreign powers, the Front indicated in July of 1965 that it would allow international supervision of the free elections proposed above. On the question of unification it has proposed that after a period of normalisation the question to be put to a referendum involving both the northern and southern regions. Finally, it calls for the neutralisation of South Vietnam and the removal of all foreign bases. However, both Hanoi, with which it differs on other questions, and the Front itself have indicated that the withdrawal of U S forces would be the result of and not a condition for an eventual settlement.

Failure of the American Solution

The military successes of the Front during 1960 finally drove the A R V N to revolt in late November of the same year. A paratroop force which had previously suffered reverses in the P M S at the hands of the V-C, staged an unsuccessful rebellion in Saigon within a few days of President Kennedy's election in early November. If the revolt tended to underscore the serious erosion of the government's position, the assumption to power of Mr. Kennedy brought to the

White House a figure long involved in U S-Vietnamese relations and who had, in fact, been among the most important original promoters of the Nationalist Solution and the now-tottering Diem regime. Increased American military aid had already begun in 1959, but under the personal direction of the President a new and important counter-insurgency programme was begun. Following Vice-President Johnson's visit in May 1961 and the Staley-Taylor Missions in the fall, the United States committed itself to a large-scale programme of military support, including a rapid expansion of American military personnel 'advising' the A R V N. The build-up was made conditional upon the achievement of 'reforms' by the Diem regime, the chief of which was the adoption of the Strategic Hamlet Programme in March 1962.

By the latter half of 1962, the A R V N had also been greatly expanded and re-equipped with late model American equipment. More important, a new mobility had been achieved by means of the extensive employment of helicopters. So successful were these measures against the then lightly armed Viet-Cong, that Secretary McNamara was proclaiming an end to the insurgency within 18 months.

By January of 1963 the situation had so improved that American officials were complaining chiefly that the Viet-Cong would not even stand and fight. Then, early in that month a small force of insurgent troops was trapped one morning at the village of Ap Bac. The resulting battle changed the course of the war. Two-hundred Viet-Cong regulars and a handful of local guerrillas were caught in an open stretch of country and had been driven into the tiny village of Ap Bac, south of Saigon. According to their tactical doctrine at that time, they should have fled, but in the open rice fields around the village they would have been easy targets for aircraft. Trapped, they prepared to fight it out, using to best advantage the characteristically extensive fortifications the villagers had long before erected against government pacification sweeps.

Opposing them were over 2,000 troops using precisely the same tactics and equipment which the A R V N had been using in its recent victorious upsurge. But under day-long repeated atacks by helicopter-borne troops supported by heavy artillery, armour, and air strikes, the Viet-Cong held the position. By dusk the government had suffered nearly 200 casualties; its armoured forces had been heavily damaged; of 15 helicopters five had been shot down and nine damaged. That night the Viet-Cong broke out of the encirclement, guided through the government lines by loyal villagers. Ap Bac had been one of the earliest Resettlement Villages.

The departing force took with it the key to military victory over General Taylor's tactics: helicopters were vulnerable to counter-fire.

Well dug-in and disciplined troops should stand and fight. Utilising the lessons learned at Ap Bac the Viet-Cong struck back throughout the Mekong Delta. A series of major victories in March and April opened the concerted drive against the Strategic Hamlet Programme. The hamlets, described by Americans as a last-ditch effort, soon began to fall to the Viet-Cong, while many were destroyed by their own occupants.

By late fall, 1963, the Diem government was in trouble. The Buddhist protests showed it could not control its cities; in the countryside it was suffering staggering losses. After gaining the assurance of the new American Ambassador, Henry Cabot Lodge, that it would have American support if its coup succeeded, a junta of military officers seized the government on the night of November 1, 1963. Diem and and his brother Nhu fled but were caught and slain the following morning. A stepped-up Viet-Cong offensive immediately following the coup brought all the Mekong Delta under its control with the exception of the cities; most of these were and are surrounded; communication is to this day restricted to large military convoy or air transport.

Thus after nine years the Nationalist Solution had come to the same end as the Colonial Solution. Like the French, Diem had been defeated on the field of battle. Like the French, he had tried to rule with an apparatus alien to the peasant majority. Like the French, he enabled his enemies to become the expression of Vietnamese nationalism. And like the French, he had succeeded in driving his enemies into an opposition united against him. With his fall there remained no Vietnamese, and hence no political solution, to Vietnam's problems save the National Liberation Front. Refusing even to explore this alternative, American officials had only one course: reliance upon sheer military force to 'save' Vietnam.

PART THREE:

For the past five years the course of Vietnam's history has been interrupted by the American determination to forge a strategic and ideological hamlet out of all South Vietnam.
Outside lies China, the peasant villian extraordinaire, and current US policy toward Vietnam must be studied in the light of its curious reading of Chinese Destiny in Southeast Asia.

The Situation Today

In practice it is clear that from the first the U S Government understood the 17th parallel to be a permanent political boundary; government documents abound with comparisons between the Vietnamese 17th parallel, the 38th parallel in Korea and the East-West border in Berlin. As the then Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs Walter S. Robertson put it, in a speech to the American Friends of Vietnam, two years after Geneva and exactly one month before the election deadline of July 1956:

> *'Our policies in Vietnam may be simply stated as follows: to support a friendly, non-communist government in Vietnam and to help it diminish and eventually eradicate communist subversion and influence; to help the Government of Vietnam establish the forces necessary for internal security; to encourage support for Free Vietnam by the non-communist world.'*

American policy has remained substantially the same to the present day. In place of a categorical commitment to the reunification of Vietnam, Washington is prepared at best only to indicate that it would be possible following an end to the fighting and a withdrawal of communist military formations to the north, to discuss the question of eventual unification (speech of Secretary Rusk of June 23, 1965). Even this vague index of intention has not been accompanied by any precise description of the conditions under which the U S would permit the two Vietnams to be reunited. Thus, given the public declarations against the spread of communism and the fact that as late as April 27 of this year, the President continued to insist on the 'independence' of South Vietnam, it is entirely likely that as yet Washington foresees neither the time nor the conditions under which this unfortunate people may again unite its historic nation.

What then is the Johnson administration willing to negotiate or 'discuss' with Hanoi? In a 'backgrounder' published in the *New York Times* of August 25, 1965, Max Frankel, a privileged source of

administration views on Vietnam, indicated that Washington was interested in arranging negotiations '. . . not because they necessarily expect a permanent settlement in the foreseeable future, but because they believe it may be possible, during formal negotiations, to arrange an imperfect but extended cease-fire.' The appointment in the same period of Gen. Edward G. Lansdale as advisor of Ambassador Lodge indicates that the administration sees such a cease-fire as an opportunity to rebuild without interference a South Vietnamese government capable of making a comeback in the countryside.

America's Three Problems

There are at least three distinct problems involved in Vietnam, recognised as such by the Johnson administration. From the government's standpoint, the most important of these concerns China. Washington believes that should South Vietnam lose its independence, i.e., fall to the communist-led National Liberation Front (N L F), the influence of China in Asia and the world would be immeasurably increased. In its more sophisticated forms, the 'domino theory' has a certain cogency. It should not be considered in terms of outright military coercion or the extension of guerrilla activities everywhere. But, given a Vietnam unified under the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (D R V – North Vietnam), there is every likelihood that the position of the communist group in Laos would be enhanced, that Thailand would modify her extreme anti-Chinese position, and that generally each of the states of Asia would find it necessary to adjust, sometimes slightly and sometimes more, to the changed power relations implied.

Certainly even more important than this consideration is Washington's belief that China is using the Vietnam problem to challenge the U S by means of a new strategy of communist world conquest – the War of National Liberation. Here what is at stake is not merely China's and our relative influence, but the very principle of coexistence. According to this view, most cogently expounded by the Secrtary of Defence McNamara (speech of March 26, 1964), three kinds of war and war threat may be readily identified: world war (nuclear), local wars (e.g. Korea), and wars of covert aggression and subversion, the first and most important of which is the war in Vietnam. The overwhelming nuclear and conventional might of the U S has been adequate in the Secretary's view to forestall communist reliance on either of the first two kinds. But we have not yet established either our technical capacity or political willingness to defeat wars which feature not nuclear bombs or conventional armies but lightly armed native guerrillas encouraged and supported from outside. Until we do, we face challenges of this kind around the globe. In addition, it is China, far more aggressive than the Soviet Union, which threatens

to disturb the tinderbox of the under-developed world by aiding and encouraging these local dissidents. Should we fail to respond in Vietnam, the Chinese view will be vindicated, she may well seize the leadership of the Soviet bloc, and we may be faced with the necessity of fighting World War III. Thus the defense of South Vietnam's boundaries is equivalent to a defence of coexistence.

(It is important to note in this connection that the rationale for the war in Vietnam does rely on the principle of coexistence. The war has received its most articulate and its strongest support from many of those who were, only two years ago, in the very forefront of the struggle to achieve a *détente* with the Soviet Union. Those who oppose present American policy in Vietnam are not contending with the simplistic anti-communism of General Walker, Barry Goldwater and Chiang Kai-shek. They are arrayed instead against such distinguished, informed and responsible Americans as journalists James Reston and C. L. Sulzberger, former government officials Arthur Dean and John J. McCloy, and academics Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., and James B. Conant.)

China is not the only consideration in the Vietnamese war. In particular, Washington recognises that the desire of the D R V for national reunification is a factor in the struggle. Believing North Vietnamese assistance essential to the continuance of the southern rebellion, it hopes by direct bombing of the North and indirect pressure from the Soviet Union to dissuade Hanoi from maintaining that aid.

Finally, the administration admits to a third problem, the fact that a considerable part of the countryside – in their view not a majority – is in revolt against Saigon. Washington has tended to try to obscure this point somewhat, though President Johnson acknowledged it was true when he remarked, on May 13, that legitimate grievances and understandable hopes moved '. . . many of the individual fighting men that we must now, sadly, call the enemy.' In direct contradiction to the official propaganda presented in the 'White Paper' of February 1965, the Johnson administration claims merely that outside aid caused the rebellion to move beyond what Saigon could cope with unassisted. In other words, Hanoi did not initiate the rebellion and is not entirely responsible for it. Hanoi merely moved the revolt beyond the threshhold of Saigon's fragile capacity to suppress it. I will not quarrel with this erroneous view here, as I have indicated elsewhere my view of the origins and magnitude of the rural revolt in Vietnam. It is enough for my argument that the administration admits even as much as it does.

U S officials believe that if outside aid were to cease the 'pacification'

of the countryside would follow; or as Secretary Rusk put it so chillingly,

> '. . . *the indigenous aspects of it could be brought to a conclusion very quickly and that (sic) the South Vietnamese people could turn back to the problem of building their country and improving their constitutional system, elevating the economic standards of the country and get on with the modernisation of the country which has been their purpose from the beginning.*
>
> '*Q. But only by military force, Mr. Secretary?*
>
> '*A. I am not commenting on that. I think the pacification of the country would be easy if the external aggression were stopped.*'
>
> (Press Conference, February 25, 1965.)

America's Single Response

Our current massive military effort in Vietnam is, at best, a response to but a single one of the three distinct problems: namely, that posed by the Chinese. Even here, there is much that is curious. First, to the present date little evidence has been presented that the Chinese have made any significant military or logistic effort in behalf of either Hanoi or the southern insurgents. No responsible claim has been lodged that there are Chinese units or advisors in any part of Vietnam, and the number of Chinese weapons identified has been insignificant. As I. F. Stone has pointed out, the 'White Paper' of this year claimed that from June 1962 to January 1964, an eighteen month period of exceptionally heavy fighting in Vietnam, only 19 Chinese weapons were captured. Since in the same period, a total of about 7,500 Viet-Cong weapons were captured, the Chinese contribution was almost nil. Even further, if it were true that China was involved in a novel and critical military challenge to the U S in the Far East, it certainly ought to follow that her armed forces be so organised and trained as to indicate she was prepared to exert a maximum defence should the policy bring about an American counter-attack against China herself. Yet, according to no less competent an authority than former Deputy Secretary of Defence Roswell Gilpatric, 'the very character of China's military forces and the strategic doctrine around which they are built suggest a purpose on its part to avoid serious conflict with the U S and a deliberate isolation from those areas of conflict which would lead to a world war.' (*New York Times Sunday Magazine*, May 30, 1965.)

In light of the official view that China is the villain, it is equally curious that the Soviet Union has been the major military and economic supplier of Hi Chi Minh's regime. Such military supplies as North Vietnam has been able to obtain to ward off American air

attacks have come from the Soviet Union, and it is believed by U S Defence officials that the anti-aircraft missiles so provided are manned by Soviet crews (*New York Times*, August 22, 1965). Though this would seem to indicate that the major American apprehension ought to be directed against the Soviet Union, the news item just cited carries with it the additional information that there is an informal Soviet-American agreement not to make an issue of the Russian crews lest the resulting polemics contribute to a deterioration in their relations.

The bulk of the evidence which holds China responsible for the Vietnamese fighting consists of statements by Chinese leaders. These indicate only that China approves of the challenge to the U S while urging the Vietnamese to greater determination.

In the apparent absence of other evidence indicating a Chinese role in initiating, directing, and supplying material support to communist policy in Vietnam, it is extremely curious that American policy-makers have allowed the Chinese problem to take so prominent a place in determining American responses, especially when the other major problems in Vietnam present themselves in far less ambiguous form. American policy does not take into account the significance of North Vietnamese participation in the fighting. That is, Washington purports to believe that a combination of massive punishment from the air and Soviet pressure will induce Hanoi to cease whatever support it gives to the N L F. This position fully overlooks the fact that Hanoi's assistance to the southern insurgents is not a negotiable matter: that for the D R V to cease its assistance to the South would threaten the very life of the regime. There are three quite separate and important components to this situation. First, the mountain peoples of Vietnam, particularly those of the Southern Mountain Plateau centring on Pleiku-Kontum, constitute a significant minority problem for any Vietnamese government. These peoples are quite primitive and differ culturally from the lowland Vietnamese whom they fear and who in turn tend to despise the montagnards. In addition, the French encouraged separatist tendencies among them. No Vietnamese government can pretend to legitimacy unless it can offer proofs of its willingness and capacity to bring the mountain peoples within the national community, and only Ho Chi Minh's communists traditionally have been able to do so. It was significant that in spite of two years of strong pressure on the D R V to lend assistance to the southern rebellion, such assistance was not proferred until after May, 1959, i.e. in the period immediately following the beginnings of the montagnard rebellion against Diem's attempt to resettle them in *agrovilles* and plant large numbers of lowlanders on their tribal lands.

To expect Hanoi is able to cease its support of these tribes betrays a serious unrealism in Washington.

Second, something like the same problem is posed in the relationship of the northern communists to their southern comrades. Once before, at Geneva, the northern leadership yielded the southern communists to their enemies. In these past eleven years no southern communist has escaped the loss of friends and comrades, few have escaped death and imprisonment in their families, all have witnessed the South once again torn by fratricide and foreign intervention. Given the long tradition of southern separatism in Vietnam – even among its communists – any attempt on Hanoi's part once more to trade the interests of the northern state against the independence of the southern zone is likely to destroy its claim to national leadership and bring about a permanent division in the Vietnamese nation. Such a decision is unthinkable.

Third, the communist party of North Vietnam has exacted extraordinary sacrifices from its people and discipline from its members primarily on the basis of its claim to being the only fully national Vietnamese political grouping. Here, too, a withdrawal pleading either the safety of the North or the interests of the 'socialist camp' would threaten the fabric of northern society and the coherence of the party itself. American policy, committed as it is to contending only with the Chinese problem has inadvertently placed the leadership of North Vietnam in a position where each of the alternatives seemly open to it will lead to the destruction of the regime. If they continue to support the South, the regime will be bombed to rubble; if they don't, they are threatened with defections among the minority peoples, in the southern Party, among their own people, and within the very Party, which they have spent a lifetime creating.

Finally, the American preoccupation with China has led to a policy impasse with respect to a 'considerable part' of rural South Vietnam. Prominent American officials such as Secretary Rusk and Ambassador Lodge are on record as indicating that the rebellious peasantry are to be pacified and neutralised by all the might of the U S A, following the hoped-for departure of the few northern cadres. Since 1957 a 'considerable part' of rural Vietnam has waged an incredibly bloody and truly epic struggle, first against Saigon's well-equipped army and now against the military riches of the United States. After a struggle of such heroic proportions it is both base and foolish to ask that these people throw themselves on the mercy of their enemies.

Further, however unpleasant this is to hear, however unjust Americans may feel the Vietnamese response has been, the fact is inescapable that the most effective appeal in N L F propaganda has been the

charge that the Americans came only to replace the French and to deny the independence of Vietnam.

Finally, many rural southerners, whose list of genuine grievances is far more serious even than that of the Buddhists, are required by current American policy to lay down their arms and trust in the capacity and integrity of a military government which consists primarily of urbanised and westernised types demonstrably and admittedly distant from peasant aspirations, a government which contains some of the very same people who, under Diem, originally drove them to rebellion. Whatever may be one's judgment in regard to other aspects of U S Vietnamese policy, this much is clear: to acknowledge that a 'considerable part' of rural Vietnam has been driven to rebellion and then to insist that it place its sole trust in Saigon and Washington is to pursue a policy completely lacking in justice, a policy of which every American ought to be ashamed.

Is a Vietnamese Solution Possible?

Eleven years ago at Geneva, the great powers forced upon the Vietnamese a solution to their internal problems which was no solution at all. It left a divided nation. It pre-figured a new decade of warfare for more savage than that against the French. Now American policy proposes a new international solution, one dictated not by the European problems which dominated at Geneva, but by the Asian problems created by the differences between the U S and China. Is a *Vietnamese* solution possible – one which takes into account the interests of the people and political groupings of Vietnam?

The central consideration in any purely Vietnamese solution to Vietnamese problems is the role of the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam. It is certain from statement after statement, both public and informal, by the D R V that it is prepared to defer to the Front: 'The internal affairs of South Vietnam must be settled . . . in accordance with the programme of the South Vietnamese National Front of Liberation . . .' (speech of Premier Pham Van Dong, April 8, 1965).

As for the South Vietnamese rebels themselves, while it is clear that there are a number of armed political groups opposing the Saigon-American attempt at pacification and retaining a military independence sufficient to enable them to pursue their own objectives, the N L F has been able to hold most of them within its coalition. Thus, in spite of some defections, the Cambodian and Chinese minorities, and Hoa Hao, Cao Dai, Binh Xuyen, and montagnard elements are represented in the Front and seem determined to deal with the U S through it alone.

The Liberation Front most frequently states its position in terms of a return to the Geneva Agreements, often quoting all or part of

Article 7 of the Final Declaration to substantiate that position: 'The Conference declares that . . . the settlement of political problems, effected on the basis of respect for the principles of independence, unity and territorial integrity, shall permit the Vietnamese people to enjoy the fundamental freedoms, guaranteed by democratic insitutions established as a result of free general elections by secret ballot.' It insists that the 1954 Agreements are adequate, if there is a willingness to observe the terms, and that no new international conference or U N intervention is either needed or desirable. However, following a settlement of the Vietnamese problem by the Vietnamese themselves, the Front has suggested that a new international conference of the concerned powers might usefully serve to ratify the solution and lend international guarantees to its terms. The Front's opposition to an international solution to the war seems based on a feeling that their Russian and Chinese allies will do little if any new bargaining for them and that the U N is too heavily influenced by the U S.

The N L F demands that it be included within the Saigon government. This is the heart of the disagreement between the Front and the Johnson administration, for Washington has indicated over and over again that it will not agree to a coalition government in South Vietnam (Max Frankel in the *New York Times* of August 25, 1965). The nature of this demand, however, has not been fully explored, for the Front has indicated that it recognises the new power relationships implied by the American presence and the existence of the Saigonese Army. Consequently it has never demanded a monopoly of political power in Saigon, though it does believe that its leadership of the current struggle and its ability to field the single most effective Vietnamese fighting force will give it a 'leading role' in any case.
After his visit to South Vietnam, *Viet-Report* Advisory Editor Robert Browne reported an N L F proposal for a solution in Vietnam. It offered:

- *An immediate cease-fire with a freezing of the current military positions of both sides.*
- *Adjudication of the problems arising out of the cease-fire by an international body.*
- *Preparation and execution of a troop withdrawal by the U S over a six month period.*
- *A district-by-district election campaign to constitute a new national assembly from which a coalition government would emerge.* (*New York Times*, July 22, 1965).

The Front foresees that the problem of re-unification can then be settled along lines prescribed in the Geneva Agreements: after a delay to allow time for both zones to work out a new relationship, a

free election resulting in reunification will follow. The delay is both natural and realistic given the problems involved, since the two Vietnams have developed different social systems. Probably reflecting their bitter experience at being left by Hanoi to bear the brunt of the Diemist repression and the consequent war, Front leaders usually make a point of adding that the reunification must be carried out on a 'basis of equality between North and South.'

Contrary to Washington's belief, both guarantees and concessions are offered in the N L F position. Any district-by-district election in South Vietnam guarantees that a wide variety of groups will be represented in the resulting national assembly. In August the N L F representative in Moscow indicated that the Front would accept the maintenance of a token U S military force in Vietnam for the indefinite future. (*New York Times*, August 22, 1965). Finally, the Front offers a neutral South Vietnam. There is every reason to believe that the D R V would honour this neutrality, since, as Hanoi points out, she herself has in 11 years allowed no foreign military bases on her territory and joined no military alliances. In short, in exchange for the neutralisation of South Vietnam, the U S is offered the neutrality of the D R V. It is unfortunate that both the Front and Hanoi are given to such vigorous and truculent official propaganda, for it appears, misleadingly, as we have seen, to confirm Washington's 'belief' that no negotiations are possible.

In spite of official American notions to the contrary, it is difficult to assess what the effect of a Vietnamese solution in Vietnam would have on China. Certainly the importance of Vietnam in Chinese affairs is small. India, Taiwan, Mongolia and the Soviet Union are much more significant to the Chinese. The current military build-up in Vietnam has indicated that the U S is unlikely to be forced to a settlement under duress, so a catastrophic enlargement of the Chinese presence is not to be expected. Of course Chinese influence will grow in peaceful Vietnam, but that appears both a natural and desirable result, since any normalisation of China's relations with the rest of the world entails a marginal increase in her role there.

Conclusion

Two fundamentally different choices seem open now to American policymakers: a divided Vietnam, each zone wracked by serious internal instability and providing opportunity after opportunity for great-power meddling, or alternatively a united and stable Vietnam able to respond normally to the diplomatic and political influences of China, the Soviet Union, and the U S. The greatest obstacle to the latter solution appears to be Washington's inability to respond to changes in the Far East as it has responded so successfully to those in

Europe. Such changes require far more courage and daring on the part of U S political leadership than do warlike declarations of iron intent and leaden intelligence.

Those who follow the course of the war in Vietnam through the American press cannot help being aware of the enormous destruction wrought by American air attacks on both North and South and by the introduction of heavy-firepower American ground units. Quite aside from all polemic questions concerning Viet-Cong terror and responsibility for the destruction, Americans must acknowledge that their efforts in Vietnam fall like a Biblical plague on innocent and guilty alike: napalm destroys by the acre, B-52's by the square mile. The productive capacity, the technology, which allows us to carpet our own country with useful goods of every kind enables us to carpet tiny South Vietnam with goods of a very destructive kind: shrapnel, high-explosives, machine gun bullets, napalm, phosphorous, defoliants and now gas.

Even if military defeat were at issue, it would be better to accept it than to commit genocide, which is the likely result of the continued American build-up. No amount of outcry about 'the viciousness and culpability' of the other side can obscure the fact that this will be the effect of the American war in Vietnam. But military defeat is not at issue. What *is* at issue, among other things, is the legitimate desire for unification by the Vietnamese and the equally legitimate desire for a voice in their government by a 'considerable part' of the southerners, including communists. Until we are prepared to satisfy these legitimate demands, our policy in Vietnam will continue to be one more shameful instance of great power brutality.

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